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Spy gave Russia secrets to help fight against Hitler

By Richard Ford and Peter Hennessy

The Soviet Union could not have had a better placed "mole" inside British intelligence at the moment of its greatest peril in World War II than Mr Leo Long who held a news conference yesterday to admit that he had spied for Russia with Professor Anthony Blunt.

Mr Long's work in MI14, the branch of War Office intelligence dealing with the deployment of German forces, processed thousands of decrypted signals transmitted by the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe in what they believed was total security by the German Army and Air Force as they faced the Red Army after Hitler moved east in June, 1941.

The material Mr Long was in a position to supply would have been regarded as pure gold by Russian military commanders who were on the retreat until they turned the tide at Stalingrad in January, 1943. Soviet signals intelligence was poor, though Moscow received officially some of the fruits of British cryptography in a form which heavily disguised its source.

Professor Harry Hinsley, Master of St John's College, Cambridge, the official historian of British intelligence in World War II, confirmed yesterday that from the point of view of Russian military intelligence, "MI14 would be the obvious place to have somebody".

At his news conference in London Mr Long, aged 64, who lives in north London and is a former senior executive with Columbia Pictures, said he had contemplated committing suicide last week. The thought had occurred when he learnt he was to be named as a spy in yesterday's edition of *The Sunday Times*.

He said: "Without trying to whitewash myself in any way, because what I did was clearly illegal and wrong, I cannot see how it can have been damaging to Britain. I'm not saying categorically that it was not. It could have been in ways which were not clear to me."

"I never passed any material as such. It was always in the form of what it looked like or what we thought the Germans were going to do."

From the recently published second volume of Professor Hinsley's history and from what he said yesterday, it is clear that Mr Long's branch of military intelligence regularly primed the British chiefs of staff and their Joint Intelligence Committee not only with the current dispositions of German air and land forces on the eastern front, but also with assessments of their likely

intentions derived from decodes supplied by the government code and ciphers school at Bletchley Park.

Mr Long's confession is bound to rekindle the parliamentary disquiet about the degree of Soviet penetration of the British civil service and its clandestine agencies that has erupted periodically since the exposure of Mr Long's recruiter, Professor Blunt, the art historian and former officer in the security service, MI5, in November 1979.

Two Labour MPs, Mr Edward Leadbitter (Hartlepool) and Mr Dennis Canavan (West Stirlingshire), are to raise the latest revelations about espionage activities in the Commons after Parliament resumes on Wednesday.

They are to ask how many spies have been given immunity from prosecution since the last war and will give the Government, who had no official comment to make yesterday, a chance to respond to Mr Long's unmasking.

Mr Long's exposure stemmed from a clear hint as to his existence and identity in a history of MI5 published last month by Mr Nigel West.

Mr Long, who is thought to have been second in command in military intelligence on the

Allied Control Commission in Germany after the war, was named to British intelligence in 1954 by Mr Michael Straight, an American who had spied for the Russians.

Speaking from his home in Maryland, Mr Straight, aged 65, said: "I told them that I suspect that Leo Long might have

He said both he and Mr Long, a Communist at Cambridge, had been members of the exclusive Apostles debating society. "In 1964 I was shown, by British intelligence, a list of between 100 and 150 names who they knew were members of the Cambridge Communist movement. Some were barristers but others were in the civil service. I recognized a lot of the names and confirmed to them that Blunt was the major recruiter in Cambridge with Burgess behind him."

All of the Cambridge circle entered the public service before the positive vetting system, which dates from 1948, existed as a first line of defence against the penetration of Whitehall by foreign intelligence services. In the wake of the Hollis affair, the Prime Minister invited the Security Commission under Lord Diplock, a Law Lord, to reexamine the system, which had not been reviewed since 1962.

The immunity from prosecution granted to Professor Blunt in 1964 aroused great resentment in the Commons when it was revealed two years ago. Mr Long told *The Sunday Times* he had been given the impression during his interrogation in 1964 that he would not be prosecuted, though no promises were made.

Sir Michael Havers, the Attorney-General, repeated yesterday that "as far as I know, in secrecy cases, only on one occasion since the war has immunity been granted and that was to Blunt".

Mr Long said yesterday that Professor Blunt had supervised his work in the early 1930s, and "taken a benevolent interest in him" when he was an undergraduate reading languages at Cambridge. Later "I was posted in the German section of military intelligence in the War Office. This was by no means a planned operation or penetration. This was a fortuitous posting because I was an academic with linguistic qualifications."

"It was there purely by chance, because Blunt had occasion to visit the department from time to time, that we met up again. He said it would be very useful to the Russians to have any information. I could

Mr Long, used to incline to the moderate wing of the Labour Party until the party ran them out and he now had sympathy for the SDP. He spoke of his deep regret and remorse at his activities, adding that it was only the fear of leaving his wife Vera, whom he married in 1951, to "face the music" that prevented him from committing suicide last week.

He had only told her of his spying at 4 pm on Friday. "It is the only thing we have never shared together," he added. "This started since the first exposure of Burgess which suggested that the hunt was on for someone. I feel in one sense removed from it. We are talking about a young man 20-25 and I am on the point of 65. It is almost unreal."

"I can understand theoretically the reasons which persuaded me to do what I did. I have lived in anxiety for years, not that this would become known to the secret service, but that it would be exposed to the world and the effect it would have on my wife and friends." His generation at Cambridge, where he studied at Trinity College, had been obsessed with the onward march of Hitler and had nightmares about the Nazis coming to England and making all people on the left targets. "The only force in the world that seemed to stand four square against Hitler was the Soviet Union, about which we had fantastic illusions."

Asked how many others might be involved, Mr Long said he had no reason to believe there had been widespread penetration or evidence of others being recruited at the time. He had given the fullest cooperation to the security services after his confession in 1964 but he was not prepared to give names to a "pack of hounds". Mr Long said: "I think this would be terribly unjust and innocent people. People whose names will be very well known to the security services."

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